

2012 Australian Awards for University Teaching

CITATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT LEARNING



Alan Calder

Teaching and Learning Development

TITLE

For over 14 years of developing student-centred and evidence-based language and learning support initiatives that empower students to succeed in their learning journeys.

ABSTRACT

My sustained contribution to academic support and student learning was initially driven by a fascination for the way in which social interaction, persistence, academic development, student satisfaction and successful learning communities are interconnected with peer support and a successful transition to higher education. I commenced work at the Cairns campus of JCU as a Learning Adviser and Academic Developer in 1998. Cairns students are over-represented in the 25+ age group, come from diverse backgrounds and are often academically underprepared, as is illustrated by a campus retention rate in 2010 some 5% less than that of the JCU average and 7% less than the Townsville retention rate (Corporate Planning and Performance, 2012). These data, and Bradley's (2008) Review of Australian Higher Education, have informed my practice and encouraged me to develop initiatives that address the needs of under-represented and underprepared groups.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO APPLY FOR A CITATION?

My application was a way of gaining some recognition for TLD about the direct impact we have on the quality of teaching and learning at JCU. I certainly had my doubts as to how I could provide sufficient evidence as to my impact on student learning given that my role involves support of academic staff and students rather than direct teaching. However, I was mentored in the process by my Director and other previous citation recipients and found that I did have statements from students and colleagues over a number of years that could be presented as evidence for my contribution. The more I delved into this material, the more I found the resultant personal reflection a really useful experience. My hope is that now others in JCU who undertake support roles will also consider applying for citations.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF YOUR TEACHING PRACTICE AND HOW ARE YOU SUPPORTED IN PURSUING THESE PRACTICES AT JCU?

I am inspired by the many dedicated academic and professional staff at JCU and it is a privilege to work in an area where I can observe the magic that occurs when good teaching and effective learning practices come together. Peer support is central to my personal practice, just as it is to successful student learning. I have been fortunate to develop in my role through the generous guidance I have been given by valued work colleagues over a long period of time.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR TEACHING PRACTICE HEADING IN THE FUTURE?

I think that it is important that we continue to nurture the academic language and learning support strategies that have become so much a part of life at JCU. We know what makes a difference to students and we must continue to embed our literacy, numeracy and peer support strategies within the curriculum with increased collaboration with academic and other professional staff. This is an ongoing and challenging process that is dependent on TLD staff building relationships across the University and supporting staff and students in their teaching and learning endeavours. This is what I like about my job, and while I acknowledge the importance of policy and practice, it is the 'personal' that cannot be overlooked as a common theme in all successful learning journeys.